

GN Recommends Six of the best perennial sunflowers



'Bitter Chocolate'

Large single yellow flowers up to 8cm (4in) wide have a distinctive chocolate scent. Mat, clump-forming plants have long narrow leaves. Flowers appear late in the season, typically August to September. **Height** 2m (6ft 6in).



'Capenoch Star' AGM

Large anemone-centred yellow flowers up to 20cm (8in) across are produced on a medium height stem from July to October. Plants are slow spreading but not invasive. **Height** 1.5m (5ft).



'Lemon Queen' AGM

One of the best popular varieties, a strong-growing but not invasive. Masses of pale yellow flowers up to 5cm (2.5in) wide from August to October. Plants form a dense clump about 60cm (2ft) wide. **Height** 1.5m (5ft).



'Loddon Gold' AGM

Another well behaved variety that can cope with some shade. Double, golden yellow flowers up to 8cm (3in) across look a bit like chrysanthemums and appear from July to October. Plants spread slowly but are not invasive. **Height** 1.25m (4ft).



'Miss Mellish' AGM

Bright yellow, semi-double flowers up to 11cm (4 1/2in) across with wavy petals that look a bit like cactus dahlias. Flowers appear from August to October and are particularly good for cutting. Plants can be invasive. **Height** 1.8m (5ft).



'Monarch' AGM

Large single golden yellow flowers reminiscent of an annual sunflower. Flowers can be up to 20cm (8in) across and appear late in the season, from September onwards. Makes a dramatic plant for the back of the border. **Height** 2m (6ft 6in).



Expert tips from Martin Blow of Special Perennials

- Perennial sunflowers prefer reasonably dry soil in sun. They'll be OK in shade but not as good.
- Some varieties can be invasive as they spread from underground runners and tubers. Although varieties such as 'Lemon Queen' and 'Capenoch Star' do spread, they shouldn't cause a problem.
- They're best grown from young plants and by division rather than from seed, although seed of 'Lemon Queen' is fairly readily available.
- Plants are easy to divide as they're so vigorous and you'll get lots of plants from a single one; the best time to do it is early spring. Divide clumps with a sharp spade or a knife, taking fresh growth from the outside and getting rid of any woody bits.
- Plants die back to ground level over winter and some fleshy ones can rot on the soil surface but they're usually just shrunk back to a growth bud just below the soil surface and will average right in spring.

- Plants are generally self-supporting so don't need staking. Deadhead regularly to keep them flowering. The largest flowers are produced by helianthus 'Monarch'; removing some of the side buds will encourage plants to develop even bigger flowers.
- For a bold planting scheme try combining perennial sunflowers with other perennials such as heleniums, monarda, delias, triphalia and Bidens aurea.
- Join us and Martin Blow, Special Perennials, Yew Tree House, Mill Lane, Nankelow, Cheshire CW3 0JB. Tel: 01270 811443; www.specialperennials.com (Nursery not open to the public)

What to grow with perennial sunflowers

Make the most of these bold yellow sunflowers by combining them in a hot colour-themed border, alongside dahlias, or clematis, carnations, helenium and kniphofia.

Purple and bronze-leaved plants also contrast well with the sunflower's yellow petals and darker centres. Try growing them alongside coltsfoot, berberis or sambucus.



Exotic canna flowers



Colourscape 'Royal Purple'



Vivid clematis



Bold and brilliant dahlias



Fiery red hot poker